

AIR conference revels in ‘peer palooza’ fun, education

On April 23-25, 2019, the Alabama Department of Mental Health Office of Peer Programs and Wings Across Alabama presented the Alabama Institute for Recovery at beautiful Shocco Springs. This year’s theme was “A Peer Palooza” and featured lots of fun, friendship, and recovery-oriented activities.

The event kicked off with a welcome from Alabama Department of Mental Health (ADMH) Commissioner Lynn Beshear, followed by the presentation of the RESPECT and Hope Awards.



Following a delicious dinner — a signature special of Shocco Springs — the traditional Talent Show let everyone cut loose with their best stuff: music, poetry, and humor. This year’s event added a couple of options for those not in on the talent bonanza: a Science Fiction Social and Show hosted by Jessica Hales, and a Post Card Party led by Nick Snead.

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Kim Hammack—2019 Hope Award winner

The Hope Award is presented to an individual or organization for their statewide efforts to unify and benefit the various stakeholders in the mental illness arena of Alabama.

In her nomination of Kim Hammack for the 2019 Hope Award, Sylvia McConnell Richey, a Certified Peer Specialist at East Alabama Mental Health, wrote:

“I sincerely, and without reservation, nominate Mrs. Kim Hammack for the 2019 Hope Award. In her many years of working in mental health she has never wavered in her focus on improving the lives of individuals

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Peer specialist Mike Herring ‘found’ himself in recovery by helping others

Mike Herring, an Alabama Peer Support Specialist, is a longstanding leader in the Alabama mental health consumer movement. He is known for his caring attitude, positive outlook, and knowledgeable approach to helping others move toward recovery. But it wasn’t always this way for Herring. He himself struggled for years before learning to help himself, and then help others along the way.

“I grew up in Mt. Vernon, and went to Citronelle High School, so I was a south Alabama guy all the way,” Herring said. “I played a lot of sports growing up, including basketball, baseball, and football. I was the youngest of six children. My dad was a World War II vet, and mom and dad raised us in the Baptist church. I was what you might call a late surprise to my parents, so my siblings were all much older. But we all got along very well.”

After high school, Herring went on to college, first at Faulkner and then at the University of West Alabama in Livingston. By this time he knew something was wrong, and he eventually got into trouble with the law. He had been working as a trucker, driving all over the South from Texas to Florida and up into Kentucky, but just sitting alone in that cab for hours at a time was doing him no good and he realized he had to quit.

Like many arrests related to mental health issues, Herring’s “crime” was unintended. Since he could no longer work, his truck had been repossessed by the local bank. He reported it to the police, assuming it had been stolen, but the police said they had no idea where the truck was and didn’t show any interest in the matter. Herring told the police chief that



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Here, consumers had an opportunity to write to their representatives encouraging them to support the mental health agenda. There was also an ongoing Wings art exhibit, a Wingo (bingo) game breakout, a crafts room, and a respite room.

Along with these traditional activities, there was a new initiative entitled Exploratorium in the Bagley Center. Here, Amanda Deason led appealing presentations of recovery-oriented content geared toward peers and stakeholders alike. The Exploratorium also introduced conferees to various state and national mental health recovery initiatives and ideas.

As always, there were health screenings going on in the Chapel annex, and the Advocacy Office free yard sale remained as popular as ever. New this year was an eight-hour Mental Health First Aid Training. The course is designed to enable participants to help someone who is developing a mental health problem or experiencing a mental health crisis. Just as a course in CPR helps a layperson without medical training assist an individual experiencing a heart attack, mental health first aid training helps assist someone experiencing a mental health crisis. Participants received certification following the course, as well as a basket of freebies.

Following a restful night in the many lodge rooms scattered across the campus of Shocco Springs, the first full day of the conference kicked off with a pair of keynote addresses in the chapel. The first was The Respect Initiative: Sparking Resilience and Recovery. Joel Slack, founding director of Alabama's Office of Peer Programs, was unable to attend due to a family emergency, so Mike Autrey filled in along with two initiative graduates, Tunja Torbert and Mark Litvine. We wrote about the RESPECT Initiative in our last issue of LISTEN.

This presentation was followed by an address entitled "Technical Assistance: The Help We Need to Help Each Other." Here, Jeremy Countryman of the CAFÉ Technical Assistance Center, Tallahassee, Florida, explored how we might escape the isolation of living with a mental health condition and find community and healing. Jeremy's own experience of not knowing where to turn ultimately led him to develop a program that gives mental health consumer organizations like Wings Across Alabama the critical "technical assistance," or help, that they need to represent the voice of people with mental health conditions, spread the message that it's okay to ask for help, and to build a proud, vocal community of peers supporting recovery across the state.

Following lunch, the afternoon was filled with a wide variety of workshop options. Special effort was made this year to ensure there was robust attendance at the workshops, and it really paid off. There



were also new, fun, and unusual options this year, including a very popular fishing techniques workshop and sessions that focused on the relationship between mindfulness and exercise and the move toward recovery. The workshops are described in a separate section of this issue.

There was time to relax and socialize between the workshops and dinner. And then it was off to a solemn and spiritual candlelight vigil in memory of those who have gone on ahead of us, followed by a spirited dance at the Stevens Center on the hilltop overlooking the Shocco Springs campus. Fueled by plenty of lemonade and watermelon, the tunes kept reeling and the dancers kept rocking.

The last day of the conference on Thursday kicked off with a NAMI Connections support group meeting prior to the final keynote presentation entitled "The Truth About Substance Abuse." Here, Pam Butler of the Office of Peer Programs, used her own story of recovery to describe key aspects of substance use disorder and the resources needed to obtain and maintain recovery, and the importance of peer support in our system of care.

Just before our final lunch together, conference-goers enjoyed the raffle drawing for "party favors," which is always a spirited time when lucky consumers get to have fun and go home with valuable prizes.

All in all it was another great conference that really lived up to its theme of being a real peer palooza! Thanks to all for your help in making this a week to remember. We'll see you in April!

HAMMACK— HOPE AWARD WINNER

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with mental illness. She understands that the mental health system exists for one purpose and one purpose only: to assist individuals on their journey toward recovery.”

“As Director of Community Programs at the Alabama Department of Mental Health, Kim has been a champion for consumers. Kim’s support for peer programs has been especially important to consumers across the state. She believes in the importance of the consumer voice and the importance of consumers always being at the table. She is a strong supporter of consumer operated drop-in centers, a strong supporter of Wings Across Alabama, and is working to expand their presence across the state.”

“Kim is a passionate supporter of our Certified Peer Specialist program and knows that peer support is a key component of recovery. She not only preaches the benefits of peer support, but is working hard to expand peer support across the state. Kim has worked hard to get peer services to be Medicaid billable and ensure peer specialists are appropriately paid for their work.”

“Kim clearly meets the criteria of the Hope Award, and I cannot think of anyone more deserving of receiving this important award.”

Congratulations Kim, and thank you for your life of service to others!



HERRING

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he was just like Barney Fife, the hapless deputy of Andy Griffith Show fame.

“He didn’t take to that very well and he put me in jail,” Herring recalled. *“So that is how I ended up in the worst place I could have been.”*

As Herring was, in his words, “melting down” in jail, he was finally sent to the hospital at the University of South Alabama in Mobile. He was assigned to a bed on the seventh floor with no meds or real care, and was then transferred to Searcy Hospital. There he was diagnosed with schizoaffective disorder and bipolar disorder.

“They kept me there in the psych ward for a couple of months and then put me on some meds,” Herring said. “Altogether I was there for nine months. This was in 1989. The main thing I remember about that experience was that it was loud. I mean really loud, all the time. People were screaming and hollering and you couldn’t sleep, so it was a terrible environment for recovery. I really felt like they could just as well have put me in a war zone and told me to recover there!”

Although he was in therapy at Searcy, Herring said it was completely unhelpful.

“It was basic. It was like therapy for adolescents,” he said. “They dumbed it down so everyone could participate and I kept wondering what kind of therapy they might have for me. I was trying to get better but it was impossible in that environment.”

After nine long months, Herring was released into a group home in nearby Semmes. He stayed there four months until he could get his own apartment.

“It was there, alone, that I actually started my recovery,” Herring said. “The best thing I ever did was to jump out of the system. It just had not been working for me. In fact, I thought I might be able to help change the system and I didn’t want to just be sitting around so I went

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Herring worked at Searcy for the next 15 years.

“This was in 1999, I believe. I guess I was one of the first peer support specialists in that part of the state. I would tell peers that I had been in their shoes but I decided to do something about it. You can be a patient all you want but at some point you must make a commitment to really try to work toward recovery. I was pretty much the only guy doing that at Searcy, and I counseled thousands of people during my time there. A lot of people on whom I had a positive effect were people who saw me come to work every day and saw the work that I did and they just wanted to be like that.”

Searcy closed in 2012, and Herring transitioned to AltaPointe in Mobile. He has been there ever since.

“My work at AltaPointe is very different than what I did at Searcy,” Herring explained. “I am now dealing with people who are out in the community and in group homes. I focus on recovery. I run exercise

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classes, where I am certified as a SAIL program trainer. Learning to exercise helps people with their strength and balance and helps them to stop falling. It certainly helped me, and I have lost more than 100 pounds doing this. We have about 30 or 40 in the classes each quarter. Of course the main thing we do in the group homes is promote recovery, and exercise is just one component of that process.”

The end goal of recovery, for Herring, is seeing someone have a better, more meaningful life. He likens this to a plant or a tree that just needs to keep growing.

“I emphasize having a better life,” he said. “I ask people to look where you are and imagine where you could be. Then I try to design a way to help them get there. Recovery. Coping skills. Living skills. All kinds of little things to help them in those parts of their lives as they work toward recovery. People want to make it in the community. For many of our consumers, just basic living skills are a huge issue, things like basic hygiene, dressing, and other skills of daily living. Mental illness can leave you emotionally drained, but you still need to be able to get up and take a bath every day. Exercise helps with that. It’s one step at a time.”

In addition to these things, Herring also works to help people find jobs and learn job skills.

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“We’re doing a lot of job placement in our community,” he said. “We have more employers in Mobile who employ people in recovery than we have people to take the jobs, which is a good thing. Right now we have well over 100 of our consumers working in the community. Once they are gone from our program at AltaPointe, most of them make it in the community, although they might come back to a Christmas party or something. Just this week, in fact, I had someone come by and tell me they are doing well and thriving in their new life. That really meant a lot to me.”

“What motivates me is just getting out and being around other consumers and being interactive,” Herring concluded. *“I am kind of a private person so it’s good for me to get out and work with others to help them improve their lives and see them move toward recovery. Basically, I recovered by helping others recover. I really feel like it is what I was meant to do, and I want to keep on like this for as long as I can.”*

AIR workshops bring new ideas, focus on wellness and recovery



For more than 25 years, the Alabama Institute for Recovery has focused on recovery, wellness, and the importance of peer support. A primary way of doing that at the annual event in Shocco Springs is through educational workshops that are fun, informative, and enriching. This

year’s slate of workshops not only continued this important tradition, but fortified it with exciting new options for consumers attending the conference. There were a total of 16 workshops, as summarized below (in alphabetical order by workshop title).

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Audrey Trippe reflects on AIR planning, vision for future events

For the second year in a row, Alabama peer leader Audrey Trippe, Certified Peer Specialist and Wings Across Alabama Education Director, took the lead in planning this year's Alabama Institute for Recovery, or AIR, a recovery-focused event that has been held for the past 28 years. Historically the conference has been planned in more of a top-down fashion, but that is changing as Alabama places more and more emphasis on peer-led experiences.

"When you get right down to it, Mike Autrey's style is to just let it go," Trippe said. "For years and years Mike did the majority of planning for the conference but that planning has shifted primarily to peers across the state. Wings solidified that leadership role over the years so Mike has become more comfortable with the collaboration we now see. Last year I actually became the Wings event and program director which led to my becoming more involved with the planning and coordination of the AIR event. I love it, and appreciate Mike's style of letting us lead at our own event. He has always been great in that way."

Trippe emphasized that she has always had a heart for the conference.

"When I was in treatment I missed out on a lot so I know how people feel about the chance of getting to come here. It's an opportunity to see old friends and make new ones, relax, and just be themselves in a non-judgmental environment. The conference, which is one of the oldest of its kind in the country, just gives people a sense of normalcy. Everyone has fun and that includes me."

Trippe said she had "tons of help" from Marie Holliday, a Certified Peer Specialist at JBS, and President of the Wings Across Alabama Board of Directors. Holliday was a big help last year in terms of coordinating the volunteers and being involved in the set-up and take-down

of conference installations. Holliday also visited the Shocco Springs campus with Trippe to make basic arrangements.

"We also created a work group with Wings employees," Trippe said. "Everyone in the work group is a consumer. When we had ideas we bounced it off the group – including our theme of 'Peer Palooza' – which we wanted to just be a big celebration, or party, no matter where you are. Just having fun and seeing others is a part of life so we just wanted to celebrate. It was a collective idea there."

In addition to her pride in all the planners being consumers, Trippe said she really enjoys revamping the program every year and talking to all of the presenters. She said she is normally a "people person" so being so organized is something she has had to work on.

"I was really into the way there were so many workshops and activities focused on healthy living this year," she said. "The fishing workshop was fantastic. And so was going on a hike of nearly three miles with no

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AIR WORKSHOPS

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Jose Telmont led a new endeavor that was wildly popular. **"Basic Fishing Skills, Equipment, and Techniques,"** explored a basic introduction to freshwater pond fishing. It kicked off with an explanation of the different kinds of rods and reels that are out there, and then moved on to basic baits and lures and casting techniques. The big idea was to add another fun hobby to consumers' recovery toolbox.

"The Important Role of Certified Peer Specialists in Successful Employment" was presented by Jessica Hales and Certified Peer Specialists Dalana Brooks, and Shatorrie Williams. The workshop provided an overview of the important role that Certified Peer Specialists (CPS) play in Individual Placement and Support (IPS) which help those who want to work to be successful in employment. This was also described in the most recent issue of LISTEN.

"Choosing, Care, and Maintenance of Therapeutic House Plants" was delivered by John Boulton. He explained how looking after plants gives people responsibility and allows a person with mental illness to be a nurturer. In addition to live demos of how to care for and pot houseplants, he also explained how gardening gives consumers the opportunity to relax, escape, and release endorphins which in turn increases one's sense of self.

Mark Prescott and Mike Herring discussed **"CPS Support Groups and How They Work."** They explored the marketing, formation, and follow-through of running your own support group. Self-care and its

central role in maintaining recovery was a major point of emphasis, along with an emphasis on how self-care can help you help others.

"Drop-In Centers: Where We Are, Where We Want To Be, and How We Get There" was led by Vickey Pearson, Program Director of the 1920 Club in Birmingham, along with Lewis Fincher of Cahaba Consumer Affairs in Selma, Terry Herden of Our Place in Huntsville, and Susan Baker of the SOMI Club in Mobile. They explained how Drop-In Centers are a valuable recovery aid, and went over the different centers in the state of Alabama. The long-range goal is that someday there will be a Peer Run Drop-In Center in every community in Alabama.

A new emphasis this year was on physical and emotional health. In **"Exercise and Mental Health,"** Tom Melbert showed consumers how exercise can have a profoundly positive impact on anxiety, depression, ADHD, PTSD and bipolar disorder. Exercise -- in combination with proper medication -- improves overall brain functioning for consumers with schizophrenia more than those treated with medication alone. The exercises that were demonstrated could be done by anyone, anywhere.

Financial security is always a big issue in mental health circles, so Cynthia and Larry Davison shared their insights into **"Financial Stability In Recovery."** The emphasis was on consumers getting a grip on their finances in the areas of budgeting, saving, paying bills,

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flat ground! We really want to have more of that, and I think next year we may have a basketball activity as well. I see us moving more and more towards a hands-on, hobby-focused series of events. Horticulture and jewelry-making were hands-on. My vision is to really help people find a passion. When you live in recovery the last thing you want to hear about is recovery without a context for recovery. Most of the people at our conference go to day treatment and that can get old. I heard people talking about that all week. This event is like the opposite of day treatment. People are able to make connections and really relax. People who didn't know me from Adam just came up to me and said this was the greatest thing they had done in a long, long time."

As usual, the Shocco Springs staff was great. Trippe said the one problem with the outdoor activities was the unseasonable heat, but that the staff was right there with extra water and whatever it took to accommodate the group. And Trippe emphasized that she always depends on help. She is on maternity leave and is looking forward to working with RoxAnn Fahlberg of WINGS as her co-coordinator.

"In addition to the really outstanding workshops and presenters, another good thing this year was the strong presence of NAMI and various support groups at the conference," she said. "That was a big change. Groups were going on all through the conference so any time people needed it they could experience peer support. Including our AA group we had five active peer groups going throughout the event. Lots of our people don't get support group outside of day treatment, but here people are volunteering. I didn't know these groups were so helpful until I was out in the real world. Voluntary effort goes a long way!"

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and gaining independence. This workshop also gave out freebies and included a completion certificate.

Health and wellness were again front and center in Audrey Trippe's "Hiking Through Recovery" workshop. This invigorating outdoor workshop let participants take a scenic hike through one of Shocco Springs' beautiful trails, and explored the idea of the relationship between recovery, health, and the impact of nature.

Melanie Evans shared her love of making jewelry in the "K.A.T.S. Creations" workshop. She showed participants how to create their very own necklace that they wore as soon as the workshop ended. She also shared how painting and jewelry making has helped her cope with anxiety.

In another nod to emotional health and wellbeing, the workshop "Mindfulness, Music, and Mental Health" showed participants how these coping skills can help reduce stress and how music can be a vital part of recovery. The workshop was led by Charles Mason, who is a Certified Peer Specialist at AltaPointe in Mobile.

Longtime Alabama recovery advocate Sylvia Richey helped participants learn how they could become writers and artists. In her Workshop entitled "Moving With Your Dreams," Sylvia shared steps that included having a dream, taking risk, taking the action, never giving up, practicing to improve, and inclusion of others to help your dream become real.

Trippe said other events that got "rave reviews" were the food (of course!), the RESPECT Initiative, and hearing people tell their recovery stories. She feels this experience trains people to be very articulate and grow in confidence.

"Mike (Autrey) has always wanted to work collaboratively and I honestly think it mattered a great deal for our consumer organizations to get on our feet and be so dependable. I think it makes Mike feel good. He is so flexible and easy to work with, so it just matters that we do a good job not only for him but for our fellow consumers."

She specifically mentioned Autrey's unfailing politeness, sense of humor, and respect for others.

"Mike is so steady," she said. "I would never want him to go anywhere. I can't imagine this conference without him. As far as the peer world goes, just knowing he is there, always answering the phone, and doing what he says he is going to do. That is a good example for all of us. I hope that never changes about our conference and our peer bonds that have grown so strong."

Save The Date!

The 2020 Alabama Institute for Recovery (AIR)

April 6, 7, & 8, 2020

Shocco Springs

"NAMI In Our Own Voice (IOOV)" has long been a popular workshop at Shocco Springs and this year's presentation was no different. T.J. Bradley, Shardae Jackson-Redenius, David Thames, and Melanie Evans all shared their personal journeys through recovery. IOOV is dedicated to the support, education, and growth of the presenters. As IOOV often emphasizes, "We are the experts on our own mental health."



Popular presenter She She Vaughan sparked the creative process in her workshop entitled "To Be A Butterfly." In it, she allowed participants to express themselves through visual arts, creative writing, and drama while incorporating laughter yoga and butterflies.

The final workshop was led by Alabama peer stalwart James Hickman, whose "Ten Tenets of Recovery" shared his personal experience related to recovery from serious mental illness. Hickman highlighted the 10 principles he used that helped guide him through his recovery, and provided participants with a decorative display of these tenets.

Another great year at Shocco was made more so by these outstanding workshops. Participants gave the workshops positive marks as the variety and substance seems to just get better every year.

The role of Certified Peer Specialists continues to expand in Alabama

Peer support in Alabama has grown from a rich history dating back to at least the 1960s. Jesse Stinson established the state's first peer support group in Birmingham, known as the "Sharing Group," in 1965. This group is still in operation today. In the 1990s, similar groups became common in other locations across the state. Around the same time, the first peer-run drop-in centers were started to provide fellowship and socialization opportunities for people with mental illness.

In 1994 Fannie Hicks was hired to work at Greil Hospital in the state's first Peer Support Specialist position. Other state hospitals followed suit by adding similar positions, and in 2007 peer services expanded from state hospitals into community mental health programs. The same year the Alabama training and certification program for Certified Peer Specialists was created. Peer Specialists now work in a variety of programs around the state including for mental illness and substance use disorder providers. The Office of Peer Programs coordinates trainings for Certified Peer Specialists (CPS) for mental illness and Certified Recovery Support Specialists (CRSS) for substance use disorder. Currently, 320 Certified Peer Specialist have been trained, and 353 Certified Recovery Support Specialists have been trained. In addition to traditional peer support at mental health providers, Certified Peer Specialist and Certified Recovery Support Specialist roles and duties are expanding and evolving.

Certified Peer Specialist

Certified Peer Specialists provide peer services for individuals living with mental illness. Peer Specialists bring their own knowledge of what it is like to live and thrive with a mental illness. Marie Holliday, a Certified Peer Specialist and supervisor of the peer programs at Jefferson Blount, St. Clair Mental Health Authority (JBS) says "To hold hope for another to believe in that person's ability when they are unable to believe in themselves is the foundation of peer support." JBS has led the way in working with the Department of Mental Health in expanding the role of peer specialists, including Youth Peers who work with young people who are in hospital settings and Parent Peer Specialists who help families navigate the various agencies that provide support for children.

JBS also has peers that work with individuals who have experience in the criminal justice system as a result of their mental illness and employs Homeless Outreach Peers that go out into the community in search of homeless individuals with mental illness.

Individual Placement and Support (IPS) programs

Peer Specialists in the Individual Placement and Supports (IPS) programs operating at AltaPointe Health Systems in Mobile, Chilton-Shelby Mental Health in Calera, and Montgomery Area Mental Health in Montgomery, provide employment focused peer support. They work closely alongside employment specialists assisting people with mental illness in their search for meaningful, competitive work.

Each IPS team includes one Certified Peer Specialist, three Employment Specialists, a Benefits Specialist, and a Part-Time Supervisor. Peer staff serve as equal members of the IPS team and complement all phases of the IPS program.

Certified Peer Specialists help consumers, clinicians, and families consider the benefits of employment and the positive impact work has on mental health. Peers are often the first to contact new IPS enrollees and help consumers navigate the complexities of returning to work. Peers assist job seekers in exploring possible career fields based on consumer preferences. They build relationships with potential employers and advocate on behalf of people entering or reentering the workforce

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The Disabling Power of a Mental Illness

The disabling power of a mental illness is often more than the symptoms of the illness and side-effects of medications. It can include the stigma and the negative impact the whole experience has on a person's self-image. What a person believes about herself, because she has a mental illness, can often be more disabling than the illness itself. For many people, the greatest impact of a mental illness is a sense of loss and disconnection. People lose friends, family, jobs, housing, hope, a sense of being in control, meaning and purpose, self-respect, dreams, and even the ability to dream of a better life. Peer specialists use their personal lived experience in dealing with mental illness and substance use disorder to help their fellow peers develop a personal plan to move beyond their diagnosis and build a meaningful life.

—Appalachian Consulting Group

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who have a lived experience of mental illness or co-occurring substance use disorders. They also partner with Employment Specialists in providing job supports which help consumers maintain successful employment.

Peer staff provide support by using their personal story of recovery. These connections between Peer Specialists and the consumer are used to inspire, motivate, and encourage success. Peer participation within the mental health system and IPS programs helps to create a recovery-oriented culture within the agency and send messages of hope, wellness, zero exclusion, and the value of work.

1st Episode Psychosis, NOVA

1st Episode Psychosis, or NOVA, is a fairly new program. The NOVA program assists individuals and their families who are experiencing psychosis for the first time. The program employs both youth peer specialists and family peer specialists, who provide encouragement, support, and guidance for youth and young adults, as well as their families. The peer specialists assist youth and young adults in identifying strengths, wellness goals, setting objectives, goal planning, and identifying barriers. This is performed through facilitating small groups on topics related to recovery, coping techniques, and social interaction.

The program has seen a significant increase in client participation and willingness to believe in recovery thanks to these positive interactions with peer specialist team members.

Currently there is a NOVA program operating at Jefferson, Blount, St. Clair (JBS) Mental Health in Birmingham, with additional programs being implemented at Wellstone Behavioral Health in Huntsville and AltaPointe Health Systems in Mobile.

Projects for Assistance in Transition from Homelessness (PATH)

Stable housing is a critical component of recovery. The Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration's (SAMHSA) Projects for Assistance in Transition from Homelessness (PATH) funds services for people with serious mental illness (SMI), as well as those with co-occurring substance use disorders, experiencing homelessness, or who are at imminent risk of homelessness. PATH activities primarily include street outreach by peer specialists and case managers in an effort to engage homeless individuals, link them to mental health services and other community resources, and end their homelessness. PATH Teams collaborate with local community providers such as HUD Continuums of Care, local law enforcement, affordable housing partners, and public healthcare entities.

PATH Teams are in the five most populated metropolitan areas of our state with the highest counts of homeless individuals. Participating PATH providers include AltaPointe Health Systems (Mobile area), Indian Rivers Mental Health Center (Tuscaloosa area), JBS Mental Health Authority (Birmingham area), Montgomery Area Mental Health Authority (Montgomery area), and WellStone (Huntsville area).

Wings Across Alabama

Wings Across Alabama is a statewide peer run organization. It currently employs 15 Certified Peer Specialists. These individuals provide direct services and also function in a leadership and coordination capacity. Their Warm Line provides over-the-phone peer support

seven days a week. These specialists play an essential role in providing quarterly education for CPS. Wings facilitates the evidence-based Action Planning for Prevention and Recovery program. They also provide two original curricula each month designed for CPS support meetings. Wings' efforts are crucial to the planning and ongoing success of the annual Alabama Institute for Recovery held at Shocco Springs.

"Wings is enjoying its enhanced role in planning the AIR Conference. We are also excited to offer 7 monthly CPS support groups across the state and APPR, a relapse prevention planning tool. Finally, the Warm Line is now open 7 days a week to meet the needs of those facing mental health challenges in our state." — Thomson McCorkle Executive Director, Wings



NAMI Alabama

The National Alliance on Mental Illness (NAMI) is a grass roots organization that provides support and education programs for people living with mental illness and their families. Certified Peer Specialists Beverly Parker, Christi Collins, and William Ruff train people in NAMI's In Our Own Voice, and Parker and Collins train for NAMI Connection. Parker also serves as the training coordinator for the two programs. The In Our Own Voice program teaches people to share stories that provide personal perspectives on living with mental illnesses. NAMI Connections is a peer-run recovery support group. Both programs are offered by local NAMI affiliates throughout the state, and in the summer of 2020, NAMI Alabama will also begin training teachers for the NAMI Peer-to-Peer program, a peer-delivered, eight-session class that helps people better understand their mental health and their recovery.

According to the Appalachian Consulting Group, "Professionals are experts at treating mental illness; peer specialists are experts at living with mental illness."

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Certified Recovery Support Specialists

Certified Recovery Support Specialists provide peer services to individuals experiencing substance use disorder. There are three peer-operated recovery centers around the state providing peer support to individuals dealing with substance use disorder. Their goal is to provide a safe place for addicted persons seeking recovery, recovery education, support groups, crisis support, navigation of the substance abuse system of care, recreation and social opportunities, and assistance in acquiring resources. The three centers include:

- Central Alabama Educational Support Specialists (CAESS), Montgomery
- People Engaged in Recovery (PEIR) Mobile
- The Recovery Organization of Support Specialists (ROSS), Birmingham



Additionally, ROSS is playing a major role in addressing the current opioid crisis by providing recovery support services in 31 counties throughout Alabama. These services include connecting individuals and family members to available resources, providing support for individuals and family members, providing transportation for recovery resources, engaging individuals at risk for overdose, and educating the community on substance use disorder and the resources needed to obtain and maintain recovery. ROSS also operates a 24/7 Addiction Helpline staffed by peers in recovery from substance use disorder. Call 844-307-1760 for assistance.

The future of peer support in Alabama will include specialized trainings targeting specific populations we serve.

Future

The future of peer support in Alabama will include specialized trainings targeting specific populations we serve. The Department of Mental Health is currently collaborating with national subject matter experts and community providers to develop and implement peer support in children's mental health. Youth Move National is working to help us launch an Alabama Youth Peer Support model, and the Family Involvement Center is working with us to help launch a Parent Peer Support model. The Office of Peer Programs is also collaborating with state hospital staff on the implementation of a Forensic Peer Support training to assist people who have become involved with the criminal justice system due to a mental illness.

Conclusion

For many years, many of us have been advocating for the benefits of including Certified Peer Specialist services in the continuum of care as the mental health system transitions to a recovery-based system of care. As peer services have increased, mental health systems across the country are recognizing that peer services are not only effective but are a vital service that must be a part of the continuum of care. According to the Appalachian Consulting Group, "Professionals are experts at treating mental illness; peer specialists are experts at living with mental illness." We look forward to the continued growth of peer support as a vital component of recovery.

The impact of Alabama Peer Specialists is felt across the globe!

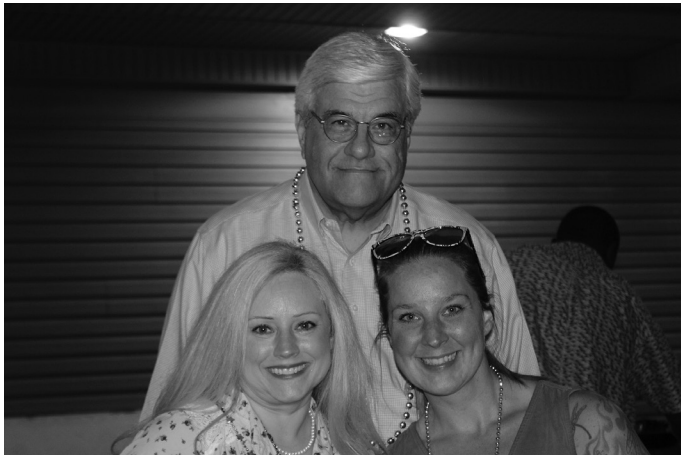
On December 6, 2019, Alabama Certified Peer Specialists Delana Brooks, Eileen Jones, and Alison Driskell, shared their experiences with Individual Placement and Support (IPS) -Supported Employment Teams on a conference call with Swedish peer specialists. The call was facilitated by Sandra Reese, a Westat, International Trainer and Consultant for The IPS Employment Center at The Rockville Institute.

The impetus for the call surfaced during a recent visit that Reese made to Sweden. Kristina Videla, an IPS supervisor in Stockholm, requested Reese meet with her and her team to discuss IPS implementation.

"Peer specialists Klara Carlsson and Jim Jorefors asked striking questions about how peers are incorporated into IPS teams in United States," Reese said. "I immediately thought of my experience in Alabama working with the Substance Abuse Mental Health Administration (SAMHSA) grant funded sites. Alabama community mental health IPS programs have a unified approach to peers being equal members of the team with shared decision making and they all have a high regard for the added value of bringing one's lived experience to the position."

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Christi Collins as a peer leader



Mike Autrey, Christi Collins, and Audrey Trippe

Christi Collins, Certified Peer Specialist and Peer Support Director for Wings Across Alabama, has been a witness to and a major driver of the expansion of peer support in Alabama over the past decade. At one point in Christi's recovery journey, she attended a mental health outpatient day treatment facility five days a week. She needed these services because of the severity of the symptoms from her mental health condition. Since 2011, Collins has traveled the country to share the gift of her recovery experience with thousands of people. She has trained Certified Peer Specialists here in Alabama and in other states, and there is no telling how many people she has boosted towards a better life with her compassion, perseverance, and humor.

ALABAMA PEER SPECIALISTS

continued from page 8

Instead of me answering Klara and Jim's questions, I thought hearing from peer specialists in Alabama would be more informative."

The Certified Peer Specialists from AltaPointe, Chilton-Shelby Mental Health Center, and Montgomery Area Mental Health Authority were joined by Alabama Department of Mental Health's Mike Autrey and Nick Snead from the Office of Peer Programs. Also on the call were Denise Bern and Jessica Hales from the Office of Mental Illness Community Programs.

"The seven-hour time difference and variances in dialect did not hinder the passion nor the spirit of participants," Hales said.

The conversation covered a broad range of topics including the development of Alabama's model for IPS-Supported Employment teams, the role of peers in recovery, the past and present challenges and concerns of peer specialists, the peer certification process, and the history of peer services in Alabama.

Alison Driskell explained, "Peer Specialists work with IPS teams to support consumers throughout the process of seeking, gaining, and sustaining employment."

Such activities are comprised of recruiting program participants by conducting educational events for consumers to learn about the

Aside from the birth of her son Christian, Christi considers her recovery among her most important accomplishments, and certainly one of her most challenging. We may sometimes wish for a definitive end to our difficulties, but more often, healing is a continuous process that requires steady, consistent work. Though Christi has become a leader in the field, she still relies on peer support herself as she takes on the daily work of getting and staying well.

"Staying connected to my peers helps me receive the ongoing support I need in order to cope with the challenges of work, motherhood, and the normal stressors from daily living"

Christi is dedicated to increasing the positive impact we can have by sharing our lived experiences. She has taken what she has learned into the community in presentations for corrections officers, mental health staff, and program administrators. Understanding what a great value peer support is in her own journey, Christi invests her energy to create the same possibility for others. She has developed an educational program designed to strengthen partnerships between peer workers and other mental health staff. In her role with Wings, she is available to offer this program throughout the state. Christi is eager to see Alabama make the most out of peer support as a mental health resource.

"When there is access to peer support, the potential for wellness is accelerated," Christi affirmed.

We may sometimes wish for a definitive end to our difficulties, but more often, healing is a continuous process that requires steady, consistent work.

program, advocating for employment as a recovery tool with mental health agency staff, addressing stigma and misperceptions employers might have about people living with serious mental illness and co-occurring substance use disorders, offering hope to IPS participants that a life working is possible, and providing follow-up support activities.



"It is so fulfilling and rewarding working as a Peer Specialist. I now get to share with others my experience of years spent in deep depression and as an alcoholic. My experience, strength, and hope help consumers realize they're not alone in their feelings and, also, they may learn from what worked for me," said Eileen Jones.

"We hope this initial exchange of information will continue to grow into a long-term collaboration between the Alabama IPS Supported Employment Peers and the IPS Sweden Peers," Bern concluded.

2019 RECOVERY CONFERENCE

2019 RESPECT AWARD Winners



The RESPECT Awards are given each year to individuals who are consistently respectful and supportive to individuals with mental illness. RESPECT is an acronym for the characteristics of the recipients of the Respect Award: Responsiveness, Encouraging, Sensitive, Perceptive, Expediting, Caring, Thoughtful.

Mrs. Jessie Madison-McLemore

Program Coordinator, Jefferson Blount St. Clair Mental Health Authority Gwen Adams Rehab Center; Nominated by Jerome B. Dorsey, Certified Peer Specialist

Jamie Herren

Executive Director East Alabama Mental Health Center; Nominated by: Sylvia McConnell Richey, Certified Peer Specialist

Naquisha Calhoun

Residential Therapist, Jefferson Blount St Clair Mental Health Authority; Nominated by James T. Washington, Woodlawn Group Home Coordinator

Robert Eison

Volunteer, Our Place; Nominated by Our Place, Teresa Herden Executive Director

Ardelia Lunn

Counselor, Tuskegee University; Nominated by Dr. Deloris Alexander

Lawanda Keller

Residential Assistant, West Alabama Mental Health; Nominated by DeMarlo R. Nickson

Dr. Deloris Alexander, PhD

Director, Integrative Biosciences PhD Program, Tuskegee University; Nominated by Dr. April L. Jones, LMSW, Tuskegee University

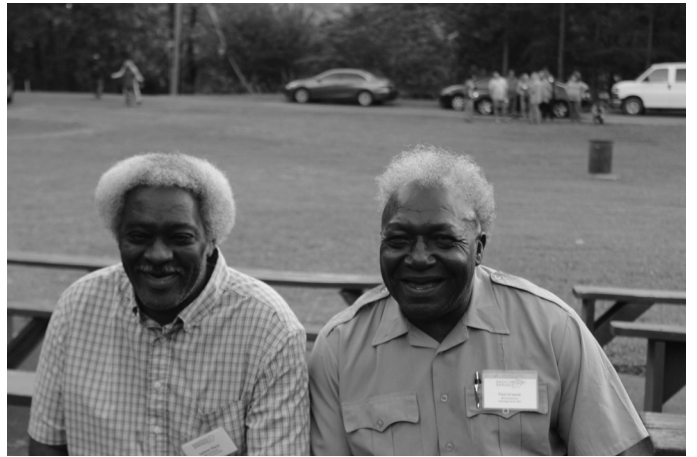
Laura Bell

Case Manager, AltaPointe Health Systems; Nominated by Sister Lucinda Claghorn

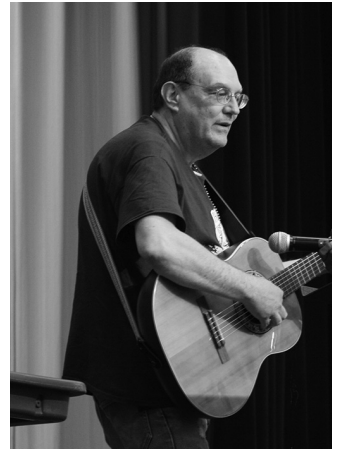
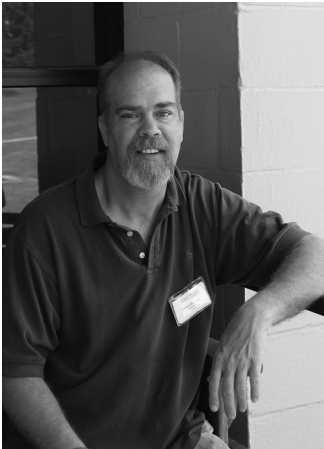
Tommy Knotts

Ombudsman, Case Manager, Mountain Lakes Behavioral Healthcare; Nominated by Jo Ward and Elizabeth Volonino

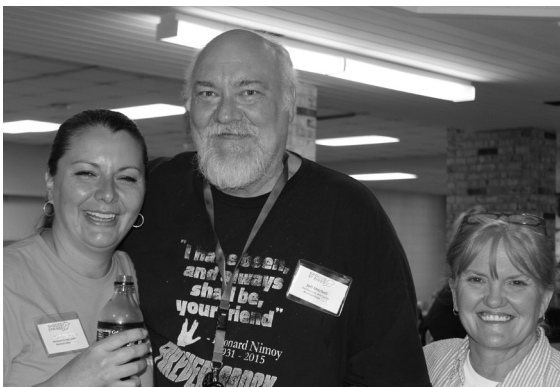
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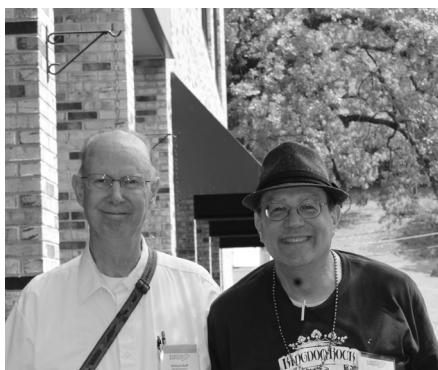
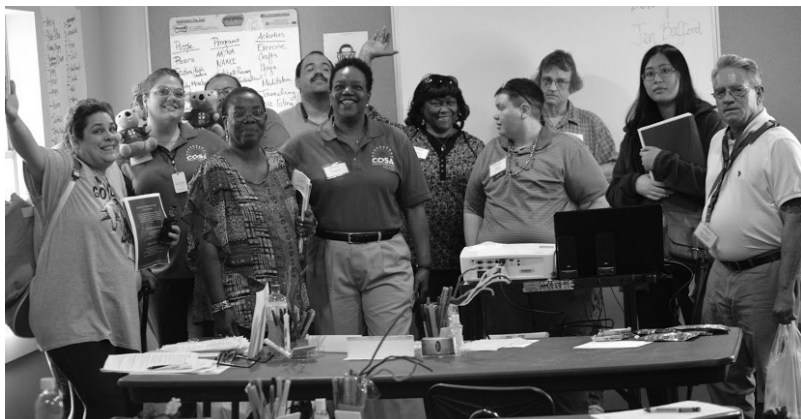
Events



2019 - 2020



Events



**Thank you to
Paul Carlson
and B.J. Bradley
for taking
photographs of
our events.**



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To find out more about how to start a drop-in center in your area, call the Office of Peer Programs at 1 (800) 832-0952.